

**TESTIMONY OF  
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UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC**

**October 23, 2003**

Good afternoon, Chairman Davis and members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today about our efforts at the Joseph Curseen, Jr., and Thomas Morris, Jr., Processing and Distribution Center.

In October of 2001, the United States Postal Service, its employees and customers became victims of a series of unprecedented and insidious acts of bioterrorism. As a result, the Curseen-Morris facility has been closed since October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2001.

This facility is a major mail processing and distribution center for the Washington, D.C. area. The role this facility plays in local mail service to this area is not easy to duplicate, especially under the circumstances. Our employees rose to the challenge, though.

Despite losing their primary mail processing center, Capital District postal employees continue to provide mail service to the residents of Washington, D.C. at among the best service levels ever.

At the time this facility was closed, I was the Capital District Manager. My office was in the Brentwood Road facility. So, I understand the anxiety, the uncertainty, and the concern that these attacks caused to the people working there.

These are my co-workers. Consequently, I invested a great deal of time and energy into ensuring that we met employee needs, concerns, and safety issues.

The safety of our employees and the public has been and will continue to be our paramount concern.

We also worked closely with the Centers for Disease Control and the District of Columbia Department of Health to assist in their efforts to provide medication to all employees.

During the weeks following the anthrax attacks, public health officials were uncertain about the extent of the exposure and risk. So, we supplied our employees with protective masks and gloves.

We worked very hard to reduce the impact of the facility closing on our employees. We quickly moved our employees and operations to alternate locations so that all employees could continue working within the Capital Metro Performance Cluster.

Employees were struggling with new routines for getting to work, so we provided no-cost transportation to bring employees to these locations for the first three months. We continue to reimburse employees who drive beyond their normal commute or who take public transportation to get to these temporary work locations.

We changed maintenance procedures. We provided information to employees about how to react to suspicious mail.

We understood that communication was key. In fact, we could not over-communicate about this issue. We want employees to feel secure in their work environment. Communication is a critical element in promoting that sense of security.

So, we made a point of communicating actively and cooperatively with everyone in any way involved, including the District of Columbia government, our employees, their unions, and local residents and businesses.

We participated in numerous town hall and employee meetings, sent out community-wide mailings, provided toll-free telephone numbers for additional information, posted current information to the USPS website, and held weekly, coordinated information sessions.

As part of the re-entry process for those employees who return to work at the Curseen-Morris P&DC, we are offering a fit-test for masks. The use of these masks is strictly voluntary. We understand that some employees may prefer the added sense of security they provide.

Our experience at the Curseen-Morris facility will help to determine the feasibility of fit tests at other facilities in the future.

We established a comprehensive Communications Plan to ensure that all employees are aware of all aspects of the clean-up and aftermath at the Curseen-Morris P&DC.

As part of the Communications Plan, we have been providing our maintenance employees who have returned to the facility with daily safety talks, daily sample results reports, and employee publications on specific information about the process.

We include updated certification sheets attesting to employees' receipt of safety talks or other communications in the onsite Health and Safety Plan documentation.

Employees who are new to the site, or have missed the safety talks or communications briefs, are then identified and brought up-to-date.

Sampling results are also posted and updated daily in three locations onsite. All areas are accessible by USPS Maintenance employees.

There is also an open door policy with the onsite safety professional. Any safety and health concerns that employees have are voiced and immediately addressed.

The Communication Plan also established Communications Facilitators at all locations, on all shifts, who are responsible for disseminating stand-up talks, gathering questions and maintaining the "Curseen-Morris Update" bulletin boards.

All of our mandatory stand-up talks are placed on these bulletin boards as well.

There has been a lot of information out there, and we want our employees to know what we know, when we know it. So, we've already had 25 stand-up talks on various topics, with most of them also mailed to employees' homes.

Along the same lines, our NEWSBREAKS are also widely disseminated and placed on the bulletin boards as required, so employees hear any breaking news from us, rather than from the newspaper.

But, sometimes, employees just want to ask questions of the experts. So, we've had a number of employee Town Hall meetings as well. Let me summarize the list for you:

March 27, 2002. A community meeting was hosted by DC Councilmember Vincent Orange, Sr. with multiple agency participation.

May 16, 2002 – three sessions with USPS Vice President of Engineering Tom Day, DC Dept of Health, EPA , CDC and all Capital Performance Cluster leadership team.

May 22, 2002 – two sessions with USPS Vice President of Engineering Tom Day, DC Dept of Health, EPA , CDC and all Capital Performance Cluster leadership team.

June 27, 2002: Community Meeting – Coordinated by USPS with multiple agency participation. Over 82,000 notification flyers mailed to Ward 5 residents & businesses; additional flyers distributed to area churches

August 19, 2003 – three sessions with Tom Day, DC Dept of Health, Facility Restoration Manager Mike Goodwin and Capital Performance Cluster leadership.

September 26, 2002 -- Community Meeting

October 3, 2002 – three sessions with the same speakers.

December 11, 2002 – Final community meeting before decontamination began.

Two one-day, free conferences were held for employees at the Wyndham Hotel in Washington, DC on Oct. 12 & 13, 2002 to offer inspirational support to employees.

And, three supervisory briefing sessions were held on August 12, 2003 to provide updates on building.

But we've done more than just hold meetings. Our communications plan included many other ways of providing employees with timely and accurate information.

We provide “Write to Know” forms at time clocks. Employees can mail the forms in and receive prompt replies to their questions.

We established an 800 number, available 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week. Answers are provided within 36 hours. A special number was also established for deaf and hard-of-hearing employees.

We have held bi-weekly telecons with all local unions to keep them informed of the progress on the facility. We have given local union members two private tours of the facility to show them the progress of restoration.

In addition, we kept track of every single question raised at the employee town halls. These questions were answered in writing, mailed to employees’ homes and placed on the bulletin boards.

Postal Vision, our internal TV network, has been utilized extensively throughout the process to inform employees of major events.

Three posters have been produced and placed on bulletin boards showing restoration progress.

As Tom Day mentioned, the restoration of the building includes a number of enhancements for our employees, including replacing all water fountains, public telephones, complete renovations of all restrooms, and the re-wiring of the entire building.

The medical facility in the building will be brand new as well. It will have 24-hour doctor and nursing help available for the first 30 days of operation. It will be a top-of-the-line facility, and will give employees the best medical advice and services possible.

We have held a number of focus groups with employees to discuss their concerns and anxiety about returning. And we will continue to have Employee Assistance Program counselors available around the clock to better address possible employee stress or anxiety.

These counselors will be closely monitoring employee stress levels and walking the workroom floor to better gauge employee comfort with working in the facility. We have also developed training for all supervisors returning to the facility on managing employees under increased stress.

We will be mailing out two documents to the homes of all returning employees. The first one explains how to discuss their return to the facility with their family members. The second focuses on discussing the issue with their children.

We are also initiating a short term voluntary program to monitor employees who are absent for work-related illnesses. This will help us identify any trends regarding types of illnesses, note any clusters of complaints, and assist employees in obtaining care if they so desire.

In addition, during the first day back in the facility, we are holding a briefing to, among other things, explain to our employees about these stress monitoring efforts and the specific resources available to them in the restored facility.

As for the building itself, as Tom Day mentioned, we decided that it was in the best interest of the Postal Service and our neighbors in Washington, D.C. to clean the building, clean it completely and return it to active service.

Throughout the process, safety was – and remains – our top concern.

We worked closely with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to develop a site-specific health and safety plan designed to ensure our employees' safety at the facility during the restoration and reconstruction.

The plan addresses standard construction site safety as well as that of our maintenance employees, and has been fully reviewed by OSHA.

It also includes personal protective equipment requirements, standard safety talks and certifications, hazard communications documentation and site-related Material Safety Data Sheet documentation. These datasheets provide detailed emergency response information for exposure to specific chemicals and other workplace substances.

We also developed a complete hazard communication package that includes a responsibility matrix, labeling requirements, handling and storage requirements, ordering requirements, disposal requirements, proper use documents, first aid data and datasheets for all chemicals and other substances known or possibly present within the facility during the restoration and renovation.

Employees and maintenance workers have access to these materials, which are continually updated as conditions onsite change.

A multi-functional team, consisting of experts from the private sector and the Postal Service, has created, and is implementing, a Human Resources Plan to provide all Curseen-Morris employees with the information, tools and training they need to feel safe and be productive when they return.

We recognize that some may find returning to the building simply too difficult. With this in mind, we have agreed with our national unions to accommodate all requests for permanent reassignment to other facilities.

Our schedule calls for plant and district leadership to return to work at the Curseen-Morris facility in late November. We anticipate that retail and limited mail processing operations will follow within weeks.

At the end of the day, we want this facility to be the best, the safest, and the finest representation of the men and women who've worked there for so many years – in particular, our co-workers Joseph Curseen, Jr. and Thomas Morris, Jr.

In the past two years, we've held two memorial events to honor Joseph Curseen, Jr. and Thomas Morris, Jr. – one in November of 2001 and another in December of 2002.

A Moment of Silence was also held earlier this week.

In addition, a Curseen-Morris Reentry Committee, with employee and union representation, is planning a reentry ceremony which will also serve to dedicate the building in honor of Joseph P. Curseen Jr. and Thomas L. Morris Jr. The event will be open to all employees and their families. We will also provide tours of the facility.

We recognize this facility's importance to the local community. Now that the Environmental Clearance Committee has concluded that the fumigation was successful and that employees can safely return to the Joseph Curseen, Jr. and Thomas Morris, Jr. Processing and Distribution Center, we look forward to reopening it and restoring it to its critical role of serving the people of Washington, D.C. and the nation.

Thank you, Chairman Davis and members of the Committee. I would be happy to respond to any questions you might have.

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